

Pro Rail Nebraska General Membership Meeting

Place: University of Nebraska – Omaha-Milo Bail Student Center

Time: 9:00 am November 13, 2012

Attendance as taken from registration sign-in sheet: Richard Schmeling, Ralph Hayden, Mike Skulavik, Bob Kuzelka, W Don Nelson, David Purdy, Randy Goeke, Matthew Roque, John Selmer, John Robinson, Jason Rose, Cindy Tefft, Madeline Brush, Dan Quick, Roland Lynch, Liz Veazey, Stephen Osberg, and Nathan Jonulewitz.

KMTV attended via Zoom.

The meeting was opened by President Matthew Roque at 9 am.

The minutes from PRN's last general membership meeting held December 7, 2019 were approved.

The treasurer's report as presented by Ralph Hayden was approved. The report shows an ending balance of \$8678.40.

Our first presentation was by John Selmer, Director of the Nebraska Department of Transportation. He comes to Nebraska after 32 years at the Iowa Department of Transportation. He talked about his role in designing the redevelopment of the interstate highway interchanges in Council Bluffs.

He noted that railroads "never come up in conversation with Nebraska senators."

He pointed out that in his experience the only interaction the Nebraska Department of Transportation has with the railroads is generally related to crossing issues.

The DOT's focus in rural Nebraska is making current 2-lane highways 4 – lane roads. He noted that the DOT is really still a highway department. He noted that the Department's interest and finances are geared toward highways.

He engaged those in attendance in conversation during which time the need for an updated state rail plan was noted. Mr. Selmer agreed that a state rail plan is needed. Matt Roque offered PRN's help to Mr. Selmer in beginning that task.

Our next presentation was by Jason Rose, Customer Relations Manager from Omaha's Metro Transit. He gave us an update on Omaha's Metro's ORBT and the NEXT study.

Jason reported that ORBT's ridership has been higher than anticipated. Fares are now being charged. Jason presented Metro's hopes and plans for possible route expansions of both ORBT lines and traditional bus routes. He also showed a variety of plans for improving bus stops and system maps at those stops.

Our next presenter was Stephen Osberg, Director of Transportation and Urban Development from the Greater Omaha Chamber's Connect GO.

Mr. Osberg noted that cities in the U.S. which are attracting new workers are those which are investing in public transit. Surveys suggest that a majority of folks are open to using public transit rather than having to drive to work alone. He noted that at present only 28% of jobs in Omaha are reachable within a 45-minute transit ride.

Access to jobs and entertainment has everything to do with job retention and economic growth.

Mr. Osberg reviewed the results of a survey which showed that the top two concerns/hopes of respondents were 1. Fill in potholes on the streets and 2. The need for walkable neighborhoods.

Mr. Osberg noted that in this survey "walkable neighborhood" meant being able to access all of one's life needs without having to get in a car. The Chamber's response to these survey results includes investing in and supporting the Dodge Street Orbit development, supporting the planning of a north-south Orbit route possible on 24th street which would serve impoverished neighborhoods where transit is critically needed, local bus improvements and the development of a core mobility system.

He noted the continuing discussions of street car development in Omaha's densely populated neighborhoods.

He noted the challenge that a transit line from downtown to the Airport poses. One such challenge is that the line passes through more than one municipality and the other being that the population and business development is very sparse between downtown and the Eppley Field.

He pointed out the planning going into developing a new multi-modal bridge over the Missouri River between Omaha and Council Bluffs.

He also reviewed the redevelopment of old downtown streets for the needs of the 21st century which at this point means returning many of these one-way, 4 -lane streets to 2-way, 2-lane streets and thereby providing space needed for bike lanes and green space.

Another goal of Mr. Osberg's agency is to fill in the gaps in the city's sidewalk system around all elementary schools thereby ensuring that all elementary schools are connected to the greater urban sidewalk system and not without safe walking access.

Mr. Osberg noted that these transit goals are on a 10-year timeline.

The Lutz Advocacy award was presented to Senator Dan Quick for all his past support.

1. Our next speaker, Liz Veazey from Mode Shift Omaha outlined her organizations mission and vision for greater equity in access to Omaha's public transportation network.

It was noted that Jim Hanna had provided his report from the Rail Passenger Association. It was handed to all in attendance and will be posted on the PRN Website.

Roland Lynch gave a brief presentation and provided a handout about a newly created Midwest Rail and Passenger Association.

The meeting then turned to PRN's business.

Bob Kuzelka moved and Richard Schmeling seconded the adoption by acclamation of the following PRN Officers and Directors with the terms to run into the year indicated: President – Matthew Roque (2022), Vice President – Robert Kuzelka (2023), Secretary – Randall Goeke (2023), Treasurer- Ralph Hayden (2022), Director District #1 – Richard Schmeling (2022), Director District #2 – David Purdy (2023), Director District #3 – Michael Skulavik (2022), Director District # 4 and RPA Liaison – Jim Hanna (2023). The motion passed.

Discussion was held related to what our focus needs to be in the upcoming sessions of the Nebraska legislature. John Selmer from the DOT pointed out that LB 12 (Commuter Rail Study) would be a hard sell.

LB 575 was noted as important as it would put us back in MIPRC (Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact). It was agreed that it is important for Nebraska to be part of MIPRC.

Suggestions from the floor included the need for PRN to find existing bills in the Legislature that appear most promising and then make the connections necessary to include/attach our concerns to those bills. This method has a long history of being more productive than trying to introduce a bill from “scratch”.

Richard Schmeling and Bob Kuzelka agreed to meet with John Selmer to discuss the development of a Nebraska Strategic Rail Plan.

The meeting was adjourned at which time many in attendance enjoyed a Ride on ORBT to Westroads.

Respectfully submitted: Randy Goeke 12/2/2021